**The Cultural Dimension in the Educational Process (The case of Turkey)**

* **The Legal Framework of Cultural Diversity in the Turkish Educational System**

Education is vital to preserve the cultural heritage and knowledge of minorities within the states in terms of language, arts, and history. Therefore, the constitution, internal legislation of states, and international obligations signed by states must specify constitutional and legal articles obligating the government to address cultural diversity and acknowledge the intellectual heritage of minorities in terms of language, history, values, and arts within the different educational curricula, while giving each minority the right to establish their own schools and universities. In this context, the Turkish identity and heritage are being promoted within the different school curricula according to constitution articles, while acknowledging the languages ​​and cultures of other ethnic and religious minorities are being banned. [[1]](#footnote-1)

In this context, Article 42 of the Turkish Constitution provides that no any language, other than Turkish, may be taught as a mother language to Turkish citizens in any of the training or educational institutions. Also, Article 3 of the Turkish Constitution states that Turkish is the official language in the state, and these articles prohibit the use of the Kurdish language in The Turkish educational system, which represents an inherent discrimination against the Kurdish language and culture, within educational curricula at all levels of education[[2]](#footnote-2). And while the second paragraph of Article 42 of the Constitution allows the teaching of foreign languages ​​in Turkish training and educational institutions for the three different minorities that were recognized in the Treaty of Lausanne, which are the Armenians, Greeks and Jews[[3]](#footnote-3), giving the Turkish government the right to define educational materials and representing a constraint on their various cultural dimensions.

According to the previous article of the Turkish constitution, Roma, Kurds, Assyrians, and Chaldeans minorities are not entitled to establish schools for teaching their own languages. This is considered a systematic policy under the law used by the Turkish authorities to eradicate the languages ​​of some ethnic and religious minorities, reflecting the “Turkification” policies that destroy cultural diversity in the educational process under the law and the constitution. Notably, receiving education in the Turkish language affects minority students’ ability to understand and communicate, as they need educational and cultural institutions and curricula related to their intellectual and linguistic heritage.[[4]](#footnote-4)

With regard to the international agreements signed by Turkey, which oblige countries to provide culturally and intellectually relevant education for minorities, Turkey made a reservation to Article 27 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights[[5]](#footnote-5), which provides that people belonging to different minorities shall not be denied the right to enjoy their own culture or profess and practice their own religion or use their mother tongue in conjunction with other members of their group, in the countries containing ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities[[6]](#footnote-6). Turkey's reservation in this regard reflects its denial of minorities to establish educational institutions that includes their own culture and intellectual heritage.

Hence, it can be said that the different Turkish laws do not reflect the right of religious and ethnic minorities, with the exception of those stipulated in the Treaty of Lausanne, to enjoy the establishment of educational institutions or obligate the country to represent the minority cultural heritage including art, history and language within the curricula of various educational institutions, representing the poor assimilation of the cultures of minorities and indigenous peoples within the Turkish educational system. On the contrary, there is a set of constitutional articles that not only prevent cultural, linguistic and intellectual representation of minorities in the Turkish educational curricula at all educational levels, but also encourages the adoption of a racial discrimination policy and the “Turkification” of the cultural contents of minorities within the educational process.[[7]](#footnote-7) It is worth noting that discussing the educational rights of Turkish citizens came in general in Turkish laws without regard to the cultural rights of ethnic and religious minorities and ensuring their representation in educational curricula, reflecting the law’s failure to oblige the government to guarantee cultural diversity in educational curricula.[[8]](#footnote-8) Therefore, the next part discusses the Turkish government's policies regarding ensuring the cultural diversity of minorities and marginalized groups within the curricula of the educational system.

* **Restrictions on the Right to Cultural Diversity within the Turkish Educational System**

The Turkish government worked to change educational curricula during the month of June in the 2017-2018 academic year to include a reduction in the secular principles, by deleting Ataturk's biography, his accomplishments and some of his own sayings such as, “Peace is the best path towards nations’ happiness and prosperity.” This coincides with the growing number of religious schools and the intensification of religious content in the curricula of secular government schools[[9]](#footnote-9), which affects the cultural situation of the Alawite religious minority groups and their children in Turkish society, especially since these curricula are being taught according to Sunni Islamic doctrine and, thus, exclude the Shiite, the Alawite and other religious doctrines. In the same context, Charles Darwin's theory was removed from the school curriculum along with other parts from the subject of Education and Ethics, for putting more focus on Islamic law[[10]](#footnote-10), which represents an exclusion of other religious cultures in favor of focusing on Sunni Islamic religious education that does not reflect cultural diversity within Turkish society, affects the situation of other different religious minorities and serves the policies of the ruling party.

In this context, the Turkish government has introduced the concept of jihad and martyrdom for God’s sake in the seventh grade curriculum, along with the introduction of a set of lessons discussing the victories of the Ottoman state, in conjunction with the opinions of Turkish officials, headed by Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, on the need to change educational curricula and history books to include the culture of Islamic civilization and abandon Western culture[[11]](#footnote-11). The expansion of religious educational curricula in Turkey comes at a time when the government is removing parts related to gender equality. As all parts related to women with influence and political power in the history were removed from the ninth grade curriculum and replaced with words suggesting racial inequality and gender discrimination[[12]](#footnote-12), which represents a fundamental threat to the cultural diversity of the society.

It is worth mentioning that the Turkish government has renewed 51 curricula, with 17 curricula in the elementary stage, 24 curricula in the secondary stage, and 10 curricula in Imam and Preacher Schools, with the aim of removing all foreign terms and replacing them with their Turkish counterparts[[13]](#footnote-13). Whereas on the external level, the Turkish government has changed the educational system in the Syrian "occupied" area of Euphrates Shield. As, it applied the government's curricula with the aim of deleting every phrase that deepens hostility towards it, especially with regard to the application of “Turkification” policies and the denial of using the Kurdish language in education and replacing it with the Turkish language, which represents a clear violation of the Kurdish minorities in this region through failing to represent the Kurdish culture in educational curricula and replacing it with a Turkish one[[14]](#footnote-14).

The various amendments and reforms undertaken by the Turkish government ignore the minorities’ situation, their history and their culture. The Turkish educational curricula contains no single article dealing positively with the ethnic and religious minorities or marginalized groups. In contrast, there is an expansion in adding religious subjects and materials addressing the achievements of the Ottoman state, which is well-known for its various crimes against ethnic and religious minorities. Therefore, the next part will review some study materials from Turkish textbooks dealing with minorities.

* **The Absence of Cultural Diversity within Turkey’s School Curriculum**

In order to assess the education system in Turkey with regard to accepting and integrating cultural, ethnic and religious diversity of society in curricula and textbooks, a set of educational materials for Turkish curricula from different grades were analyzed. Among which was the third part of the textbook series directed at learning the Turkish language to the Turkish community in Germany, which depicts the Armenians as they allied in 1915 with the Russians and the British and tried to weaken the Ottoman Empire. It also claims that the Armenians abandoned their homes by written contracts following the First World War[[15]](#footnote-15). However, these books mentioned nothing about the Armenian genocide conducted by the Ottoman Empire, such as the Hamidian and the Adana massacre[[16]](#footnote-16). Moreover, these educational materials encourage and promote hate speech against the Armenian minority.

In the same context, the history book accused the Assyrians and Christians of cooperation with Russia in the First World War, describing them as traitors jeopardizing the state’s national security. In the same context, the book accuses the Syriac, Assyrians and Armenians migrants in European countries of cooperating with their home countries against Turkey,[[17]](#footnote-17) therefore, affecting the minorities mentioned by describing their history of treason, leading to the continuance and exacerbation of discrimination against them by the rest of society. Whereas, some Turkish textbooks have approached, with some hostility, the Arab culture and their betrayal of the Ottoman state, fueling hatred against them[[18]](#footnote-18).

The previous analysis of some educational materials in school curricula reflects the presence of materials encouraging hate speech against some minorities in addition to the dominance of the culture of the Turkish-Muslim majority, while ignoring the cultures of other ethnic and religious groups and sometimes distorting them- a factor that may cause educational failure for many students with different ethnic backgrounds. Among these students, is the Kurdish "Dundar Aimak", who believe that receiving Turkish education within the current cultural context and in the Turkish language has negatively affected his opportunity to find a good job[[19]](#footnote-19), which explains the impact of the cultural factor in education on the varying job opportunities in society.

* **Mechanisms of Reviewing Educational Curricula Related to Cultural Diversity in Turkey**

Although the Turkish government has reviewed school textbooks and removed some educational materials that refer negatively to the minorities, this review takes place on very long periods and it has no specific mechanisms to follow. Since the Turkish Ministry of Education removed, in 2003, all the negative descriptions of the Roma (gypsies) minority from the Turkish curricula such as meanness, miserliness, lack of modesty and theft[[20]](#footnote-20). And despite the different educational reforms made recently by the Turkish government, such as the increased spending on education and the establishment of new universities[[21]](#footnote-21), these reforms have largely ignored reforming educational materials referring to the cultural diversity in society, reflecting the representation of all segments of society, as cosmetic reforms have attracted the whole attention and focus, in clear disregard of educational subjects concerning discrimination against different groups inside Turkey.

There is also no specific mechanism by which educational curricula and materials can be modified to ensure the cultural diversity and representation of all groups of Turkish society. The context presents no different participations from Turkish civil society organizations in the amendments to the educational system. The government instead focuses on supporting religious schools such as the Imam Khatib school that focuses on religious sciences and Islamic studies and ignores the characteristics of other non-Muslim minorities, which is regarded by Turkey's civil society and public opinion as a critical point[[22]](#footnote-22), which reflects the lack of real channels of dialogue in Turkish society to consult on the amendment of Educational system, consistent with the representation of the diversity and cultural heritage of each component of Turkish society components.

* **Conclusion & Recommendations**

Overall, it can be said that Turkish legislation, government policies, and the educational content of some of the Turkish curriculum promote the lack of cultural diversity within a society. On the level of Turkish legislation and under Turkish constitution, minorities are denied the right of teaching their own mother tongues ​​in various educational institutions. The constitution also prohibit the minorities, not mentioned in the Lausanne Agreement, from the establishment of various educational institutions to teach their own culture, and Turkish laws do not contain any articles allowing the establishment of educational institutions with cultural curricula for different ethnic minorities.

On the level of various government policies, the Turkish government is expanding in the establishment of Sunni Islamic schools and institutions at the expense of reducing secular schools to serve the ruling party’s policies and beliefs at the expense of cultural diversity in school curricula, which affects different religious minorities such as the Alawites, who are forced to receive Sunni religious education that contradicts the content of their own religion[[23]](#footnote-23). Looking at the situation of religious minorities in Turkish curricula, one may find that they are very distorted and most of them are described with treachery and negligence, which promotes hate speech against them in the absence of specific mechanisms guaranteeing the representation of the various cultural segments in the process of changing educational curricula; therefore, **Maat for Peace, Development and Human Rights recommends the following**:

* The Turkish legislative institutions must amend Article 42 of the Turkish Constitution to provide for ensuring the right of all minorities to receive education in their mother tongue instead of prohibiting education in languages ​​different from the Turkish language.
* The Turkish government must remove all reservations to the provisions of international treaties, which protect minorities and educational rights of minorities, especially Article 27 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.
* The Turkish Ministry of Education develop a comprehensive policy aimed at removing all educational materials and curricula related to cultural distortion of marginalized groups in Turkish society, while developing materials allowing for the representation of cultural diversity, including the history of ethnic and religious minorities and their diverse arts.
* The Turkish government should stop its policy that supports the establishment of religious schools and develops religious educational materials in exchange for educational materials that take into account the cultural diversity of all segments of Turkish society, while eliminating religious discrimination from the various Turkish curricula.
* The Kurdish language must be an optional language in schools in the southeast Turkey, because mother-tongue education is a fundamental human right that cannot be the subject of any political bargaining and likewise all other ethnic minority languages, with the need to provide religious education for the Alawites and the Shiite minorities within Turkey, which reflects the cultural diversity of Turkish society.
* The Turkish government must develop a specific legal administrative mechanism to discuss changes in the Turkish curriculum with regard to representation of social groups and to ensure the participation of all of these groups in addition to various civil society organizations.

1. Joseph Lo Bianco, Aydin Bal . Learning from Difference: Comparative Accounts of Multicultural Education . Springer . 2016 . p 12, 149 , 166 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. CONSTITUTION OFTHE REPUBLIC OF TURKEY . DEPARTMENT OF LAWS AND RESOLUTIONS 2019 – Ankara <http://bit.ly/3aqA4a2> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. توضيح بخصوص هذا الشأن تنص الفقرة الثانية من المادة 42 على تحديد القانون اللغات الأجنبية التي تُدرَّس في المؤسسات التعليمية، والقواعد التي على المدارس التي تقدِّم التعليم بلغة أجنبية دون الإخلال بأحكام المعاهدات الدولية ، المقصود هنا بالمعاهدات الدولية معاهدة لوزان والتي تعطي لكل من الأرمن واليونانيين واليهود الحق في إنشاء مؤسساتهم الخاصة والسيطرة عليها وإدارتها بما في ذلك المدارس مع استخدام لغتهم الخاصة فيها إلا أن الحكومة التركية تقوم بالتضيق على هذا الحق بشكل كبير. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Los cuatro kurdistanes huffingtonpost . 6-9-2019 . <http://bit.ly/39dLc95> [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Draft report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review\*Turkey. Human Rights Council. January 2020 التوصية رقم 15 من جزر سليمان [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. العهد الدولي الخاص بالحقوق المدنية والسياسية، حقوق الإنسان جامعة منفوستا، <http://bit.ly/31BW3p0> [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Nurcan Kaya . Forgotten or Assimilated? Minorities in theEducation System of Turkey . minorityrights organization . 2009 . p 3 , 11 [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. مثال على ذلك القانون الأساسي للتعليم الوطني التركي رقم 1739 والذي يتضمن بعض المواد الخاص ببنود التعليم ويتجاهل وضع الحقوق الثقافية للأقليات في المناهج التعليمية الأساسية لنظام التعليمي التركي ، بنود القانون متاح على الرابط التالي <http://bit.ly/2OCEjpY> [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Yeni müfredattan Atatürk’ün 'Barış, ulusları saadete eriştiren en iyi yoldur' sözü çıkarıldı . ahvalnews . Şub 01 2018. <http://bit.ly/2H4TEvg> [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. ماذا بقي من علمانية تركيا في مدارس غولن وأردوغان؟، أحوال تركيا، ديسمبر 2018 ، <http://bit.ly/2vZRkn4> [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. الانقلاب على المناهج العلمانية تثير الجدل في تركيا، مصر اليوم، نوفمبر 2017، <http://bit.ly/2S8Y3DI> [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. دراسة: الإسلام السياسي والانقلاب يبرزان بالمناهج الدراسية في تركيا، جريدة زمان التركية، أكتوبر 2018، <http://bit.ly/2H2Yfy1> [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. الحكومة التركية تدرج رسميًّا مصطلح “الجهاد” في المناهج الدراسية ، جريدة زمان تركيا ، 2017 ، <http://bit.ly/2SsYAzh> [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. إبيك جوشكون ، الأسباب والتداعيات التعليم التركي في مناطق درع الفرات ، شئون تركيا ، العدد الحادي عشر ، ص 55 و 56 [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. كتب مدرسية تركية تثير الجدل في ألمانيا ،دي دبيلو نيوز الألمانية ، 2013 <http://bit.ly/379xMtl> [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. القصة الكاملة لمذابح الأرمن أفظع جرائم الإنسانية، العربية نت، أكتوبر 2019، <http://bit.ly/2H1XNQA> [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. آشوريو.. مسيحيو.. تركيا، صحيفة إيلاف، 2016أغسطس ، <http://bit.ly/2tCUg8c> [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. كراهية العرب .. مناهج التاريخ التركية تفضح أحقاد العثمانلية ، عثماني، 2019 ، <http://bit.ly/2UA82nm> [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. مواليد الألفية الثالثة بتركيا.. هل يهددون مستقبل الحزب الحاكم؟ ، الجزيرة مباشر مصر ، 2019 <http://bit.ly/2UvcrrD> [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. تمييز عنصري ضد الغجر في تركيا ، العربي الجديد ، <http://bit.ly/372X0u5> [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. خبراء: تركيا تتحرك نحو إصلاح جديد للتعليم يركز على الجودة والمساواة ، ترك برس ، 2019 ، <http://bit.ly/2S7PaKv> [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. المدارس التركية ـ التربية الدينية على حساب المستوى العلمي؟ ، قناة دي دبلو التركية ، 2019 ، <http://bit.ly/2vaKXgn> [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. تعديلات إردوغان على المناهج تثير جدلاً حاداً في تركياآخرها تقليص تاريخ أتاتورك والتوسع بالمدارس الدينية ، الشرق الأوسط ، 2017 <http://bit.ly/2usF4uP> [↑](#footnote-ref-23)